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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, January 22, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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News in today's letter from Washington, D. C. is about our National forest and comes from the annual report of the U. S. Forest Service.

Writes our reporter: "Last year Uncle Sam's foresters made a record in reforesting national forest lands. Under their supervision 82 thousand more acres were planted to new trees or sown with tree seeds than in any previous year. Altogether our national forests got some 223 thousand acres of new trees. Beside these newly planted lands, many large areas are coming back to forests by nature's method of reforestation. And this record achievement of the past year was made possible largely through the work of the C.C.C. and emergency relief appropriations.

"The foresters estimate that 4 million acres of forest land are unproductive at present but are capable of growing forests. Some 32 national forest nurseries are now established for the purpose of growing approved trees to set out on this land and these nurseries are supplying some 225 million baby trees each year.

"To make the resources meet the most urgent needs, most of the planting last year was in the Lake States and the South. Much of the national forest areas in these two regions is land, once privately owned and heavily cut and burned. Once trees are established there, the soil produces good forest stands, and these generally are easy to reach and relatively near the heavy centers of population and demand.

"The foresters say that they generally use artificial planting or sowing only where the forest has been badly abused by fire or over-cutting. Otherwise--that is, on lands under forest management that have an adequate stand of timber reforestation takes place naturally. The foresters simply see that trees are properly cut and that they are protected. Nature looks after the seeding.

"Fire is still the great enemy of our forests, especially when summers are dry. But fortunately recent improvements in fire protection service more than offset the tindery dryness of most of the forest areas last summer.

"Foresters say that the first few minutes are as important in controlling a fire in the forest as in a home or a warehouse. Effective fire protection depends largely on getting an adequate crew of fire fighters to the blaze in the shortest possible time. Better trails and more of them, lookout towers and improved communication systems by telephone and radio, and the presence of work crews in the forests all contributed to getting men to fire lines quickly.

"From 1932 to 1936 the average number of acres that burned each year in the national forests was about 338 thousand. This past year, up to the middle of November, only 99 thousand 348 acres had burned, although the number of fires that started was over 11 thousand, almost 15 hundred fires above the average of the last 5 years. Of these 11 thousand fires, all but 240 were under control within the first 24 hours. And more than 90 percent of them were kept down to less than 10 acres.

"In this fire-fighting record, as in the tree-planting record, the C.C.C. boys and other groups of temporary employees have a prominent place. C.C.C. Camps provided a good distribution of men who could be turned to fire fighting whenever the need arose. And C.C.C. workers proved willing and competent forest-firemen. More than this, the trails they have developed in most of the national forests in the last few years have helped to save the few minutes that in many cases made the difference between a small blaze and a great and serious fire.

"Well, that's the cheerful news about our national forests. Now for some that's not so cheerful but still worth every good citizen's attention.

"The fire that was deliberately set--the incendiary forest fire exceeded the number of fires from every other cause in our national forests last year. The foresters, you know, in their reports make a statement of the cause of each fire as near as they can find out. So the annual report for last year shows that some 22 thousand 655 fires in our national forests were set maliciously. This is 55 hundred more than the average of incendiary fires over the last 5 years. Incendiarism was the greatest single cause of fire last year and accounted for 26 percent of the fires on protected forests as compared with 24 percent caused by smokers.

"As for the damage these two kinds of fires did--the damage from the incendiary fire ran far ahead of fires caused by smokers--41 percent as compared with 10 percent. The foresters explain that fires caused by cigarettes and matches which careless smokers toss into the dry forests are likely to be discovered by the lookout or by some forest worker. But the incendiary, like other criminals, works in secret and usually selects a time and place that will permit the fire to make the greatest headway before it is discovered.

"You may be interested in these figures from the Forest service about the causes of fires on the protected area of forest lands last year. It was 26 percent incendiary; 24 percent, smokers; 14 percent debris-burners; 7 percent campers; 4 percent railroads; 2 percent lumbering; also 7 percent for lightning. Miscellaneous causes accounted for 9 percent, and 7 percent for the fires from unknown causes."

That concludes this week's letter from our reported in Washington, D.C. And by the way, if you are interested in any further information about our national forests, you can write direct for it to the U.S. Forest Service in Washington.

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